**Are You Entitled?: Investigating Different Entitlement Bases**

**Among the Narcissistic Subtypes**

**Purpose:**

For years high self-esteem was thought to produce beneficial outcomes in social and academic life. Recent research, however, suggests that artificially high self-esteem may actually result in violence.1 People with high opinions of themselves can harbor entitled expectations and become aggressive when those expectations are not met. For instance, the 2014 Santa Barbara gunman felt entitled to sex and consequently murdered sorority women for the “crime” of denying him such and other men for unfairly having what he wanted.2

This example illustrates the extreme dangers of entitlement, but this characteristic is also common among the general population and especially pervasive in narcissistic individuals. Entitled people tend to externalize responsibility3, have increased conflict4, and exhibit greater prejudice5. Knowing the detrimental effects associated with entitlement, I aimed to understand the bases of this belief. I set out to investigate if two types of individuals could both have a strong sense of entitlement but arrive at that conclusion in different ways.

I approached this question through the lens of trait narcissism where narcissism and entitlement exist on a continuum; everyone has some level of narcissistic characteristics.6 There are two subtypes of narcissism, including grandiose narcissism (GN) and vulnerable narcissism (VN). Although both narcissistic subtypes feel highly entitled7, they differ substantially in other ways. For example, self-esteem and self-efficacy are positively associated with GN but negatively associated with VN.8,9 I aimed to reconcile this disparity by suggesting that the two narcissistic subtypes justify their sense of deservingness differently. Specifically, people high in GN may justify entitlement based on their inherent characteristics (i.e. superiority-based entitlement) reflecting their arrogance and self-confidence. In contrast, people high in VN justify their entitlement based on their perception of being disadvantaged or victimized (i.e. inferiority-based entitlement), reflecting their self-doubt and hyper-sensitivity.

**Research Method:**

Participants across two studies (Ns = 280 and 135, respectively) completed narcissism and entitlement self-report measures. To test the different entitlement bases, participants in Study 1 selected domains (e.g., admiration, power) in which they felt entitled and indicated reasons why (e.g. “everyone is deserving,” “I’m naturally deserving”). Using correlational and regression analyses, we assessed the relationship between narcissism, entitlement, entitlement domain selections, and entitlement domain justifications. Study 2 included measures of superiority (i.e. perceived status) and inferiority (i.e. perceived victimhood) to provide more directly test hypotheses Correlational analyses tested whether the associations in Study 1 replicated. Mediation analyses tested the mechanisms behind the two proposed entitlement bases.

**Findings:**

Both narcissistic subtypes reported high levels of entitlement and felt entitled to similar domains (e.g. status).However, consistent with my predictions, the subtypes diverged in the bases for their high entitlement. Specifically, people high in GN based their entitlement on the perception that they are inherently superior (e.g. “I am naturally deserving”; “I am hard working”). In addition, Study 2 showed that their perceptions of superiority mediated associations between GN and entitlement. In contrast, people high in VN felt entitled based on their perception of being unfairly worse off compared to others (e.g. “I have been disadvantaged in the past”; “Others have this and I do not”). In addition, Study 2 showed that their perceptions of inferiority, or feeling like a victim, mediated associations between VN and entitlement.

**Implications:**

Due to the elevated levels of narcissism found among youth today, compared to historical levels10, understanding the nature of entitlement is an especially important issue. This work furthers theoretical understanding on a core trait shared by the narcissistic subtypes and illuminates differences in how people conclude that they are deserving. For example, the Santa Barbara gunman’s entitlement may have been based on his inherent-superiority (e.g., “I am no longer a child, I am now a college male, so I deserve noncommittal sex”) or on a feeling of inferiority (e.g., “All these other men are having sex but not me and it’s unfair”). Thus, the delineation between superiority- versus inferiority-based entitlement may have wider-reaching implications on the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and societal levels that yet remain to be discovered.

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